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Report of a Research Trip to Explore Gender and Intrahousehold Dynamics: South Wello and Oromiya Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia June 10-14, 2001

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Introduction

From June 11-13, Priscilla Stone, Peter Little and Workneh Negatu visited four kebeles where household surveys are taking place as part of the BASIS/IDR research project title, "From Household to Region: Factor Market Constraints to Income and Food Security in a Highly Diverse Environment, South Wello, Ethiopia." One goal of the trip was to check on the status of the household surveys, which were underway during our visit, and speak with the enumerators and their supervisors about the work and its progress. Another goal was to undertake a preliminary investigation of gender and intrahousehold dynamics in order to make recommendations about the next phase of research. At each stop, we spoke to female heads of households, as well as to some women who were wives within male headed households, about their productive strategies, assets and attitudes about food crises. The interviews were conducted by Workneh and translated to Stone and Little.

General Observations

Although there are an increasing number of studies documenting the contribution of African women to agriculture -- describing their important role within households and the control over land, labor and produce they may have -- these studies have tended to be based on West African models of farming households. Ethiopia, while a predominantly agricultural society, differs in many respects from the models developed to explain women's role in farming elsewhere in Africa. The following general observations gloss considerable regional and ethnic diversity, but intend to situate our study in the general literature on African women's roles in agriculture and the nature and function of households. Ethiopian women, in general, are not associated with particular crops, are excluded from certain agricultural tasks (primarily ploughing) and do not seem to control any separate income from agriculture although they may be land owners. The cultural ideal is that rural women perform the domestic work of food preparation and childcare, assisting with agriculture when needed. In planting, for example, women are described as delivering the seed to the field but not broadcasting them. Women may become involved in limited off-farm activities, such as small-scale trading, brewing, and sale of firewood, but long-term outmigration for wages is described as male-dominated. Women may be members of savings associations or burial societies, but generally play a female role (such as food preparation for funerals) in these contexts.

A Ministry of Agriculture study in 1992 (reported in Frank 1999) reported that women do 40% of all agricultural labor in Amhara region including land preparation, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing. For livestock, women herd, tend sick animals, water, milk and do milk processing. Women are solely responsible for the household garden. Still, women are not labeled as farmers in most communities, since a farmer is someone who can plow and sow and while women help in sowing, few plow since it is considered inappropriate for women to plow and too physically demanding.

Cultural ideals rarely reflect reality and the rural households of South Wello raise many interesting questions about women's roles in Ethiopian agriculture and their contributions to and attitudes about recovery from shocks. Women are clearly economically active beyond the domestic sphere, but this may be reported as activity on behalf of the household or of the male household head. Women may be members of equb or kire in their own right, but may also function in a wifely capacity. Further qualitative research should be directed at understanding the options available to women, and how constrained these options might be by prevailing ideologies of appropriate gender roles, and how these differ from one woman, and one category of women (female heads of households, for instance) to the next.

A. Female Heads of Households

Certainly one of the puzzling gaps between the ideal and reality is the seemingly high rate of female-headed households in many different regions of Ethiopia. Our South Wello sample of households reports an overall rate of 24 percent female-headed households, with sampled kebeles ranging from 12-39 percent. If women head one in four households, gendered rules of labor allocation, income and land control must surely be more flexible than presumed. Female-headed households offer us the opportunity to question the rules themselves and explore the place of women in the rural economy.

There have been a number of explanations offered for the frequency of female-headed households in Ethiopia including high rates of male outmigration, military conscription, high rates of divorce, and overall gender imbalance in the rural areas. The policy environment[1], especially land redistribution, may also have encouraged female-headed households to form. These explanations do not necessarily characterize the South Wello households in our sample (where the gender balance in our sample is quite equal, although includes male children). This deserves closer scrutiny. Some scholars believe that the outmigration of women from South Wello has been underestimated (Teferi Abate, pers. com.)[2]. Women do have other options besides staying behind on the farm, including migrating out to become domestic servants or bar maids.

There are several interesting question having to do with both the causes for the high numbers of female-headed households as well as their economic strategies and how they compare to male-headed households. These questions include:

1) Are these truly female-headed households?
2) If so, what are some of the reasons these households have emerged?
3) Do they share common characteristics? Are they generally poor, for instance?
4) Do they share common economic strategies? How do they respond to times of economic stress or shocks? and, importantly,
5) Do they as a group behave differently than male households?

1) **Identifying Female Headed Households**

Defining households: Farming households are characterized as enterprises with overlapping but semi-autonomous production and consumption units managed by different members of the household that occupy different locations within the household power structure. Whether a household is female or male headed, the gendered nature of access to labor, land and other resources is important to investigate.
An interesting first question to ask is whether we are in fact capturing an actual pattern of high rates of female-headed households or are these, instead, fragments of households (or other larger kin-based units) that have developed in response to market or other social incentives. For example, does the fact that food aid is distributed to households of five people provide a disincentive for larger, more polygamous or stem households to officially form? These larger units would presumably be male headed.

But is a household of 4.9 people (our average household size) with a high dependency ratio likely to meet its own labor needs? We know of labor sharing arrangements and practices of sharecropping, which redistribute labor across households, but should some of these arrangements make us question the boundaries between households? Some scholars would argue that female heads are often closely linked economically to other households, headed by males, since she must access male labor (for ploughing if nothing else) at some point in the agricultural cycle. She may be linked to her father, a lover or other male relative. The resulting households, however, are very mobile and fluid with people moving in and out frequently (Teferi Abate, personal communication).

Might a household be defined or identified differently for different purposes? For example, for tax purposes, for food aid, for land redistribution, for inheritance, for social purposes? We know that the PA's are registering households but does this reflect a broader social reality?

What about retaining access to household resources through generations and time? Although the inheritance of land by women is not common[3] (see Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2000) there are still large sibling groups, or the children of female heads, who must deal with the threat of land fragmentation with inheritance (see below under "characteristics of female heads" for more discussion of land tenure). How do these groups avoid land fragmentation? Teferi Abate believes the decisions about who will migrate out and who will stay and farm are often corporate ones. The sibling group will decide and contribute money to set one of them up in small trading operation or to send someone to Djibouti. He feels this kind of arrangement explains how easily returning settlers were reintegrated into these communities. Again this makes us more careful about how we define households and their boundaries, but also puts into question the relationship of women, whether heads or not, to a wider group of cooperating kin.

I am not suggesting we should second-guess how the PA's identify households for our own sample, but we should be clear, nonetheless, about how these households are defined and distinguished from one another.

Historical Perspective: A related question is whether these high rates are a relatively recent phenomenon that has developed in response to drought, land registration and food aid or whether this a persistent pattern that predates the contemporary era and so should not be viewed necessarily as a pathology or a response to contemporary poverty? There is plenty of evidence in the literature that divorce has historically been quite common in South Wello, but also suggestions that in the past remarriage were more the norm. Why should women stay unmarried or is this not their choice? Is the definition of "marriage" itself undergoing change? There seems to be declining rates of polygamy (note: Dejene found no polygamous marriages in his MA research and the last reported polygamous marriage in the area he studied ended in 1998). There may be a fundamental transition going on in the marital system. Teferi Abate believes this cannot just be explained in economic terms but he also notes a change in kinship ideology and in beliefs about marriage. It is very simple for people to marry these days (very little bride wealth, very little transfer of property) and also simple to divorce. Marriage may be marked by little more than ceremonial gifts. Is this really

marriage? What would account for this change, if it is indeed true, and what effect would this have on households and their survival strategies?

We should also not necessarily assume that all female heads would fall into the categories of single, divorced, widowed, abandoned or separated. In fact, some of the female heads are married, probably with resident husbands who are too old or inform to function as household head (Yigremew Adal's study found 8-9 percent of female heads were in this category). We should, conversely, also not assume that all male household heads are married. In fact our sample shows a gap between the percentages of household heads and the number who are married. For example, in Chachato we have reported 83.9% male household heads but only 67.9% of the heads are married in Chachato. Given the cultural norm that households are crucially dependent on female domestic labor, this merits further attention.

Overall: These questions relate to interhousehold webs of mutual obligation and support -- the social capital and depth this project as a whole is investigating. If these female-headed households, for example, are embedded in social/kin networks of labor and sharing of assets that seem particularly dense or important to their survival, are they really members of extended households? In Kamme, the compounds of multiple huts were identified as multiple households. Could they really be as independent as they are reported to be?

2) **Explanations for the Presence of Female Headed Households:** In our household survey, 48% are males and 52% females. We do not know how many of these are male or female children, although we know that only 24% of the sample are in the category of head or spouse and 51% are children overall. It is difficult to know whether female headship reflects a demographic imbalance in these areas among adults. We do know that both male and females migrate out for wages but do not know the relative numbers by sex (as far as I know).

It would be important in the next round to explore ethnographically the causes for the formation of these female-headed households. I think we will need to probe beyond the stock responses (my husband left) and see if we can get some household history information that will expose the diachronic experience of households through drought cycles and so on.

3) **Characteristics of Female Headed Households**: Most researchers have found female-headed households to be amongst the poorest and most resource deficient of rural households. Although there is certainly some variation within this category in terms of wealth and landholdings, our interviews generally supported this generalization. These households seem to suffer from low rates of livestock ownership (especially crucial here may be lack of oxen for ploughing), small landholdings and necessity of sharecropping out, lack of male labor, and few off-farm sources of income. They seem to depend disproportionately on food aid[4]
Yared Amare feels that there is potential in developing the livestock sector through credit and the development of communal pastures but he notes that peasants are scared of debt and leery of taking out credit. The ownership of land is more than just access to what may be a small plot for cultivation, but gives the owner access to state resources. This may be very important to female heads of households. Food aid does not depress production (people are producing as much as they can) but it can distort the market for grains. If food aid brings the price of grains down, however, that is a good thing. Most farmers are not just dependent on food aid, but depend on transfers of grain from surplus areas. What are needed are programs that work on market liberalization along with food aid - but how do you get the balance rights? Cash for work has been discussed, but sometimes there is no food to buy even if you have the money. Food aid certainly seems inefficient, but it has been there since the early 1970s and the system has adapted to its presence. . They also seem in relatively poor positions to improve their economic prospects -- they cannot generally afford to educate their children, do not have the economic wherewithal to sponsor outmigrants once their children are old enough, and cannot accumulate adequate capital to make a go of trading or other non-farm income-generating activities.

Frank (1999) notes that female-headed households have an advantage in that they can be members of the PA and therefore have access to and are more likely to receive extension. But they remain at an extreme disadvantage when it comes to getting access to labor, land, oxen and other resources and continue to be among the most food insecure.

Access to land is clearly important, and reallocations of land through divorce and death will have a major effect on women and their marital and economic strategies. Yet the responses are not uniform. Some women chose to stay on the marital farm after divorce, even though this is not likely their natal community, to keep control of some land. If

she moves, she loses all control. Inheritance of land by women is not an important means of access to land (and have diminished since the Derg - Yared Amare) so there is little advantage to returning to their natal community. The main benefit of living in their natal community is the social capital that may come with their parents' name (Teferi Abate pers com). But how do women make these decisions and how much variation is there by age, wealth, and childbearing status and so on? These patterns could give us some important insights into the flexibility and responsiveness of the system of land allocation.

There is some evidence that land redistribution is favoring women (Yared Amare, pers. com)[5]. They hold the land and the terms of sharecropping and renting are becoming more favorable to the landowners through time. We need to check this with the women in our sample.

One area for further research is how constraining the cultural norms about appropriate gender roles are on female heads of households and how true are the stereotypes (poor, etc.)?

4) Do they share common economic strategies? How do they respond to times of economic stress or shocks? Whether this portrait is true or not, do female heads behave differently, overall than do male heads? Are they more likely to diversify their income sources?[6] More likely to sharecrop out? How much variation is there among female heads in these strategies? Are effects of age, dependency ratios, education, religion, age of children, etc. stronger than gender in determining economic strategies?

We will need to try to probe below the stock answers about standards and norms. Labor arrangements would seem particularly important to understand. Are sharecropping arrangements public knowledge? Might private deals be struck having to do with shared labor or food? Are women's calls on cooperative labor increasing or decreasing? Are they exploiting such practices as shareherding to a greater degree than male heads? Do they send their children out as herders more frequently? Has food aid decisions increased the secrecy of some of these arrangements? The hidden flows of land, labor, income, food and other inputs are poorly understood, as are the range in variation in common practices such as sharecropping.

5) **Do female heads think differently about household survival strategies than do male heads?** We should, of course, not assume all male household heads agree with one another. Effects of age, education, occupational diversification, etc. Are likely significant among men as well as women. But can we generalize about female head strategies? Do women consider themselves "temporary" heads, awaiting remarriage or the maturity of sons? Do they think, therefore, in the more short term about survival strategies? Does women's lesser political power (presumably) affect their access to information on which to base farming decisions? Are they as knowledgeable about price differentials for crops and livestock? Are they as able to negotiate the same prices for their goods (selling and purchasing) as men? These are questions having to do with power of various sorts (political, economic, social) and are especially difficult to understand, but important to remember as we design our research strategy.

B. Females within Male Headed Households

We also need to consider the role of **intrahousehold** differences in activities, strategies and attitudes about priorities for recovery. Do women in general think differently about household survival strategies than men? How strong is the effect of being a household head on women's attitudes about economic matters? My impressions were that the "party line" is that there is a great deal of public consensus about appropriate roles for women whether household heads or not. How much deviation from the norm is happening is not yet clear.

Wives of resident household heads are reported as primarily contributing domestic labor (cooking, childcare, etc.). We know they are involved in some trading, brewing (Christians), wage labor, but we do not have a good sense of the extent of this, its importance in the household economy, and the control women may have over these activities. Are women economically independent as long as the scale is very small (pin money?)? Are they never economically independent given the scale is always small?

Is there generational change? Does a returning migrant woman have different opportunities or options?

Implications for next round of research:

I think it would be very important in the next round of research to try to get a better sense of the relationship between "households" to investigate these networks of aid and obligation that transcend the household. Among the questions are:

> On what basis do households cooperate? We know that households belong to equb and kire and host and attend debo and wonfel. But are these merely residentially based or sorted by kinship? Are the terms the same for someone who is a relative and not just a neighbor? Are the terms the same for a female-headed household and a male-headed household? What sources of labor and assistance are most important? Sibling groups? Parental? Other? This may help us tease out the boundaries between households.
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> When is a female head not a female head? We were told in our interviews that a woman might file for a divorce and have the land registered in her own name after six months with no word from her husband. In reporting this to Teferi Abate, he thought this did not sound right. No woman would wait that short a time, unless there was some advantage in terms of access to land or food aid, to doing it that quickly.
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> We are sensing some dynamism in the system of sharecropping and land leasing. What are the trends and do they vary by who is sharecropping in or out? We were told, for instance, that the terms may vary if the person plowing your land for you is a relative. Is this true for leasing? For sharecropping? Is there variation in the share of the harvest? The purchase of inputs? The disposition of the crop residue? The grazing rights in the fields after the harvest?
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> Access to labor seems critical and we could hypothesize is the most limiting factor of production for female headed households. How do they respond to this gap? Are institutions like wenfel and debo evolving to meet their needs?
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> Access to livestock, especially plough oxen, also seems critical. What strategies can women use to make up for the fact that they are not supposed to plough and are less likely to own oxen than male headed households? Does this practice of shareherding have a gendered dimension? Do women value livestock less or more than men in this mixed farming system?
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> Access to other inputs, such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc. It is reported elsewhere that women are disadvantaged in their access to extension due to gender biases, poverty, etc. Is this problem alleviated by the fact that they are registered with PA associations? How can they negotiate these systems (perhaps share the expense with their sharecropper? Have the male sharecropper obtain the inputs? etc.) Are they more innovative or more conservative in trying new techniques than men?
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> Access to land. One of the very distinctive features of rural Ethiopia is land ownership by women, but how secure is their tenure and how likely are they to retain control over this land through successive generations and given their lack of labor, livestock and other inputs? If land parcels get too small, what strategies do they use?

Research Recommendations

Follow-up more intensive study of 30 households within our sample. These should not be selected randomly but should be selected along certain characteristics such as: some female heads, some male heads, some landholders, some landless, some who own plough oxen, some who don't, some with diversification of income, some more completely dependent on farming, some affluent, some poor, and households from different ecological zones and different experience of drought.

We would also want to identify households at different stages of their developmental cycles and of different compositions. Variables such as education, religion, etc. are important as well.

In terms of gender dynamics, the primary question is whether women and men think differently about survival strategies. Does this vary by whether women are heads of households?

Analysis of the most recent round of household surveys should help us identify households for further qualitative interviewing. This should occur in 2002.

Interview with Two Women in Kamme in Bati Wereda, Oromiya
June 11, 2001

Interview was conducted on the porch of house with a number of men, women and children surrounding us.

We spoke first with Aminat (Muslim name) who is a somewhat elderly woman who lives with her grown son who has become head of the household. She has transferred her land to him, which he cultivates. Some of this land she inherited from her father and since she married within her own village, she retained use of this land upon marriage. The land became her husband's since he was the head. She has grown children who have left the area. Some are close by in Bati but others have gone to Dessie or Djibouti. Although some return, others do not.

At that point, the female head joined us and we spoke with her. Her name was Debor Seid (sp?). She is a middle-aged widow with 6 children. Her first husband died 15 years ago. She married a second time to a relative of her first husband, so she stayed within the same community. Her youngest child, a 10-year-old daughter, is a product of her second marriage. I believe she is divorced from that second husband.

Land: She is using the land, which was from her husband. Previously, she had to sharecrop out her land since she had no one to plough for her. She receives 50% of the produce. But now that she has sons who are old enough to plow, she can farm it herself. She owns one ox and will be able to pay for the use of another. She is involved in labor exchange during harvest. She has hosted a debo (prepared the food) but cannot participate in wonfel since women do not work in the fields. She said that it is no problem for a female head to call her neighbors for festive labor, as long as she has the food to serve them. She has not used fertilizer on her land (nor has the sharecropper). She thinks it likely she will give the land to her sons eventually.

Livestock: She owns some livestock besides the bull. She has one goat, whose offspring she sells and one cow, from whom the bull was born but she has sold other offspring. She has no pastureland but keeps her bull on the field edges. There is a communal pasture but it is close during April-September. The Afar come during the planting season and take the animals to foster. They are paid in grain.

Food Aid: She has received food for work, twice since December. She worked for a total of 17 days and received 50 kg. of grain. She worked on water conservation and stone bundling projects. She says she both expects and hopes that food aid will continue.

Diversification: She has no room for a garden since the settlements are very dense. She tried to trade in grains, after having received some credit to get started. She found this was not profitable and stopped. There are several sources of credit including the ministry of agriculture and the Amharic credit Association. She is fearful of getting into debt and will avoid credit in the future. Some people from this community migrate to Bati for wages but the wages are very small and it is not dependable. It is better to go further away, such as Djibouti. She didn't know what they did there but the money was good.
Social Change: She sends her youngest daughter, who is 10 years old, to school but none of the older children attended school. She does not have to pay school fees for this child.

Polygyny used to be more common, with men having up to 4 wives, but under these difficult times it is hard for a man to sustain even one wife. She was the only wife in both marriages due to economic constraints. When asked if polygyny would reappear if conditions improved, she said with a shrug "it is up to the men."

Social Capital: Women have a separate kere society. She is the leader of the women's kere. At a funeral, each member contributes 20-25 cents. There is no equb tradition in this area and no other women's groups.

Food Crisis and Recovery: During a time of food crisis, people sell firewood for small amounts of cash. People used to help each other, but this has become less common as things have been getting worse since 1984. An old man speaks up at this time and says that the problems came after the derg when people had adequate land holdings and were producing a surplus. She interrupts him and says that from her point of view the derg had a positive effect since the landless were given some land and everyone had a chance. Now it is a problem of pests and drought not the derg. She thinks it is linked to religions in some way - perhaps they are cursed.

In the 1997 land redistribution she did not get any land since she already owned land from her dead husband. The land was given to the young, the very poor and the female heads. There are now no landless in this community, but she worries about the next generation when the land has to be split up among the many children.

1984 was the worst period. It is better now than it was then. Many people were pushed out of the village then and went into Bati town looking for food. They lived in tents supplied by the government who began to register them and deliver food aid. They lived for 4-5 months in these tents. This was when her first husband died. Her children all survived. They call this "savat savat" or the '77 famine (EC). They also call it by the name for the Red Cross.

She would like to send her children to Djibouti but the expense is very high to hire someone to guide them. Some have had to sell off their livestock to afford to go. She is not convinced the opportunities are that great, however. She knows of one man's son who has gone but he is working for small wages as an assistant to a merchant.

Bati Woreda Supervisor

Things are improving. Rainfall has improved, the number of livestock has grown, food for work has continued. Compared to 1-2 years ago, the trend is positive. Still food stocks are low right now and worse than they were after the harvests in November and December. Those who are low in food are selling chat, livestock, and wood and charcoal. The wood is taking from communal forests, but they are not worrying about the future. The charcoal is sold and used in Bati Town. Recently there have been policies put in place to control the sale of charcoal by Ministry of Agriculture workers. They have been confiscating the camel loads of charcoal. It is difficult to know if people are reporting their food stocks accurately. Men say that after they harvest, they give the grain to the women who are then in charge, and the men may not know what they have. They do report food aid accurately, the enumerators believe.

Food for work is not the same for all households. Some very poor households get outright aid with no requirement to work, and they participate in food for work as well. The amount of food aid may vary from one community to the next. Some communities have high percentage of very poor households and are therefore receiving more aid. Everyone wants to participate in food for work.

Besides, wood or charcoal, food for work and farming, there is almost no diversification. Since this is a Muslim area, women do not brew and work very little in the fields. There are some remittances reported, but very little. There are very few second economic agents - in this Muslim area the few there are grown sons.

What makes a success? Farmers who have good land, not only in size but quality, have a great advantage. But beyond that, they view things like skill, efficiency and the willingness to work hard as distinguishing those who make it. A farmer, for example, who times his plowing and planting carefully will do better than those who come in late.

Interview with Female Head in Yeddo Kebele, Jamma Woreda,
South Wello Amhara Zone (2655 meters high)

June 12, 2001

Female Head named Ayelech. Poorly dressed and thin. Her husband died 5-6 years ago. She has five children. The youngest is 15. None of her children have attended school.

Land: She has her own farm but sharecrops it out. She gets 50% of the harvest. She does not own any oxen. She farms her husband's land but it is very small - less than 1 ha. (3 dumait). Her husband was still alive during the last land redistribution and they did receive some land then.
For the first few years after her husband's death, she farmed the land herself. She was involved in debo both on her own farm and on others during those two years. Now the sharecropper, who is the same person each year, has full responsibility for labor. She and the sharecropper buy fertilizer and split the expense 50/50.

Livestock: She was forced to sell off her oxen when things got worse. She owns no livestock of her own but has taken in sheep to feed and fatten. When they are sold (in Jamma), she shares the proceeds with the owner. She is caring for about 4 sheep currently. She has a small plot of her own grazing land.

Food Aid: She and her oldest son did participate in food for work but they have not yet received any food. No one in the community has as of yet. They worked one day a week for the last five months on fencing of forests and

terracing.

Diversification: Her main source of income is farming. Her oldest child does a little wage labor but he earns very little (2-3 birr a day). She has a small garden and grows fava beans and onions. She manages it and sells the surplus in Jamma Town. She does some brewing of sorghum and barley. She has traded in salt and coffee. She brings these products from town and retails them here.

Social Capital: She belongs to a kire, which is mixed gender. She used to be a member of an equb but dropped out last year due to lack of money. The equb had 10-12 members and saved about 8 birr per month. She used the savings for consumption and to help with the brewing work.

The Future: The rainfall seems good this year but she is not sure about next time. Only god knows. She feels farming is the best opportunity in this area but it is not very productive since they lack the cash to buy seeds, fertilizer, and oxen. If her husband were still alive, when her son became independent, he would have had to give him some land. The land is so small, however, she is not sure what they will do. Her eldest son is staying here. She does not see migration for wage work as a viable option for young people. Some older men migrated to Bale to work on the state farms and some have come back and are building a new house, but others do not return. They are staying put.

Interview with Wife within Male Headed Household (name Ayello)

Ayello lives with her husband and five children. Two of the children are going to school.

Agricultural Labor: Women are involved in virtually all agricultural tasks, including land preparation (such as manually building raised beds), weeding, harvesting and threshing. They never plow (there is a taboo against women plowing). There are no specifically female tasks in farming.

Land: The household had to sharecrop out their land this year since they had to sell their oxen to seek medical treatment for one of the children. Her husband is now in Addis with the sick child.
There is some tree planting going on in the community for fencing, house construction and for sale.

Diversification: She does not get involved in trading since she is too busy taking care of her children. She may sell a small part of the harvest in order to buy salt, or other necessities, and she makes the decision on her own. She does not need to consult her husband. Her husband would make independent decisions as well - such as whether to buy fertilizer. They have not worked outside the area.

Food Aid: They have not been involved in food for work since they are not considered a very needy household. She has participated in community project for terracing.

Social Capital: They belong to kire and equb but not in a gender specific group. They had to suspend their membership in the equb but hope to rejoin after the harvest. There is some food sharing with neighbors and family members.
There is no credit from associations here but you can take out loans from individuals. The rate of interest is very high (50% interest). Some women have taken out loans like that to buy and resell grain.

Other: The community is about half Christian and half Muslim. Some have been converting resulting to Islam in the hope this would make it easier to migrate to Arab countries.

Enumerators in Jemma Town

In general, things have improved in this area since they first began the census but this is a difficult time until the harvest in December. The last Meher in this area was good, although there were some localized problems with frost. People seem to be buying some assets, and no one is selling. 1999 was the worst. Sources of capital include credit but it is not common and interests rates compound monthly so costs can get very high. Interest rates vary (some are 10% a month). Kire payments may be in kind or in cash. If the person who has died was a close relative, an additional payment may be expected. These contributions are reciprocal over the long run.

Food aid is being distributed only to a limited number of the poorest (in one area, only 30 households received food aid).

Second Economic Agents: They have found only 3 out of 54 households. Two are women. One is a day laborer, making tea for the school. One sells firewood. The third is a male relative who also sells firewood.

Female Headed Households: Ten of the 54 households are headed by women. Most are sharecropping out since they don't own any oxen. Only 2 out of the 10 are involved in non-farm activities.

Land: Some households who sharecrop in may cultivate as many as 5 plots in a season. These are farmers who have hybrid oxen, which are stronger. There are some landless, mostly males but some females. They survive by trading on a small scale, doing day labor, and sharecropping in.

Interviews in Gerado Kebele in Dessie-Zuria Woreda,
South Wello Amhara Zone

June 13, 2001

We interviewed the two **female enumerators** in the office of the agricultural extension officer. Other enumerators were there.

Gender Roles: Most women are not involved in economic activities. They found only two out of 54 involved in selling tea and bread. Now there is a women's affairs office that is encouraging women's activities.

Women do have more autonomy than they used to. A woman has the right to take some grain and sell it. Although she may discuss this decision with her husband, so too does the man now consult with his wife if he wants to sell. There is change although slow and gradual. Some of this may be the effect of the Women's Affairs office, which have been talking to both men and women about improving women's status. There is a women's affairs committee supported by SIDA. Women are getting credit for trading and raising poultry. Also the Amharic credit association has been paying more attention to women and providing credit for livestock and poultry. The Zone office has been selecting women to provide training.

Brideprice: Brideprice is paid but the amount depends on economic conditions. It is paid by the husband's family to the wife's family. It is paid in cash. The poor may only pay 100 birr, while the more wealthy may pay 300 birr. At divorce the money is lost.

Livestock: Married women do not own their own livestock. They belong to the household head. If she is a female head, she can own livestock. The visible fenced pasture is owned by a private investor from past Tabasi. Fencing is usually done by the government or by a private investor. The Zone officials allocated land to the investor. The community resisted this but were refused. They graze their livestock on border areas or on their own farmers.

Share herding is common here. It is done by poor men and women. Some arrange that the first offspring goes to the person caring for the animal and the second offspring they share the proceeds between the two. The arrangements differ depending on the relationship.

Divorce: There is a difference between Muslim and Christian divorce. The assumption is that the wife should get an equal share at divorce (and the children may get a share as well) of both land and livestock.

Social Networks: There is a separate kire for women and they are involved in preparing the food and contributing a small amount of money. The men are involved in construction and contribute larger shares of money. There is no equb for women except the female heads who belong to the community equb.

Land Redistribution and Irrigation: There was no land redistribution here. The farms were already very small and it was not needed. Of the 800 households in Girado, about 400 have irrigation. During the Derg, there was a

producers cooperative for the irrigated land. When that dissolved, the land was given out to its members. There are household who lease out or sharecrop out the irrigated plots (about 20%). On irrigated plots, they grow mainly cereals (barley and wheat) and a few vegetables. There is not enough water to grow many vegetables.

The enumerators believe that people are under-reporting the number of parcels they may have.

Women and Land: Out of the 400 households with irrigated land, 100 are female headed. Most of the women don't own oxen, so they may "rent" the oxen from other farmers and share half the crop residue with the owner of the oxen. This is a new arrangement. They do this mainly with relatives. In other cases, they may pay a fixed amount of grain at harvest time to the owner of the oxen.

A woman within a male-headed household controls no parcel of land, even if she owned it before the marriage. Once she marries, the whole property is under the control of the head. At divorce, the property is divided according to the original agreement of the marriage (she will probably get what she brought to the marriage). If she remarries, she may bring land, but once again, it will be treated as household land. For inheritance, however, this land may go to the children of her first marriage.

Female Heads: When asked why are there so many female-headed households in this area, the enumerators said that many men have migrated out in search of jobs. Some never return. In the past, when a woman was abandoned or divorced, she could easily remarry. Now it is difficult to remarry, especially if the former husband died, since people suspect AIDS. Attitudes about the disease are changing. If in six months time, he doesn't return and she hears no news from him, she goes to court and gets a divorce. Some may wait longer (1-1 ½ years), hoping he will return. Women will wait as long as they can (wondering has he died? remarried?), but if she gets any information that he will never return, she will divorce. In the last year or two with the drought situation, many men have left. Most have gone to Jimma to the coffee growing area. Some have gone to work on the state farms in Jaffa (Oromiya Zone). A very few do daily labor in Dessie.

Food Stocks: There has been no big change. A few are better off than when they surveyed in November and December; a few are worse off. The belg harvest is just being done now so it is not getting recorded in the survey. They are not sure the belg harvest will be all that good. They had problem with frost and with rust disease.

Food Aid: Only 2 or 3 households in this area are receiving food aid. The food aid group has its own criteria for giving aid. They see the greenness of the area and think of this as a good belg harvest. They thought this area was in a better position than others so did not distribute aid. They did distribute aid in Tabasit.

People may be under reporting the amount of food stocks they have since this may reduce the amount of food aid they receive.

Diversification: Some are selling firewood, straw and hay. Some are working for daily wages.

Interview with Female Headed Households (named Lubab Endris)
in Gerado in Dessie-Zuria Woreda
June 13, 2001

She divorced her husband four years ago. He is now living in Dessie. She has five children. The eldest is an 18-year old son; the youngest is an 8-year old daughter. Two of the children are living with her. Her eldest son, a younger son, and one of her daughters are all working as herders ("they went for njera"). They work for families within the community for food and clothing. Her eldest son is her dependent, but if he works for wages, the money is his.

Land: She has a piece of land but it is very small (1/4 of a hectare). She harvested only 70 kg from the land. She grows teff because it is a more valuable cash crop. She does not have irrigated land.

Livestock: She owns no oxen, but rents them and gives the owner of the oxen the crop residue. This is a relative of hers and she gives him the whole residue. She owns no other livestock. She used to own chickens but they died. She does not share herd.

Diversification: She used to trade within the community, as of last year, in cotton handicrafts. She has not been healthy this year so has stopped.

Social capital. She is a member of a mixed gender kire. She is involved in the food preparation as are other women, but is also a member as a household head. She is not a member of SIDA (says she was unaware of this). For extra labor, she depends on relatives.

Food aid: She received outright food aid. She has received it three times since December. She was allocated 12.5 kg. of maize (none for children).

Interview with Female Head in Temu Kebele,
Legambo Woreda, South Wello
3300 meters (very high and very cold!)

Community interview: We talked with a group of farmers, including the agricultural extension officer, who gathered around our vehicle. They were wrapped in blankets and were eager to tell us of the frost damaging their belg barley crop. This is the first belg harvest in three years and they are hoping it is not destroyed by frost and disease. The community has been doing food for work but has not been receiving the food on time. In the last six months, they have received two allocations of food aid. . Some have been migrating out for harvest work in lowland areas. Some have gone to Kalala to help harvest sorghum. They do have a large communal pasture that is kept year round, but it was very bad during the drought and many livestock died.

Interview with Elfe, Female Head

Elfe was very poorly dressed and wore no jewelry. Her husband left two years ago to try to work for wages. At first she heard he was in Addis, but she has not heard anything for quite a while. She has four children who are 5-10 years old.

Land: The land is now registered in her name. She has 2 timad (½ hectare). She sharecropped it out and shares the proceeds 50/50.

Diversification: She does some hairdressing in the community but no trading.

Livestock: She owns no livestock. She share herded last year, but this year no one has any sheep to give out since everyone is poor.

Food for work: She is getting it almost monthly and is given enough for a family of five. She works 17 days in a month terracing, working on water springs and wells.

Social Capital: She is a member of a kire as a household head but does not belong to an equb. She married within her own community, so she gets help from her own relatives (her husband's family does not help).

Future? She just hopes for a good harvest. If not this year, maybe next. She would like her children to stay in this community when they grow up if things improve. He eldest child is attending school.

Notes

[1]Yared Amare suggested we look more at the macro policy environment, for example the ADLI (Agricultural Development Led Industrialization) which has been in place since 1995-6. The theory is that smallholders will produce a surplus that will fuel rural industrialization. Initially, the industry is meant for internal markets, but the goal is export production. He also pointed me to the Global 2000.

[2]Both men and women outmigrate for wages. Some migrate into neighboring towns but others migrate further to work on coffee plantations or in Djibouti. The household surveys do not seem to be picking up female outmigration? The demographic change (more women in the rural areas than men?) is new, however. There is a common character in Amharic novels of the woman from South Wello in these kinds of occupations. (Yared Amare, pers. com.)

[3]Yared Amare is not sure we are getting the full story on access to land. The role of redistribution seems to be over-emphasized and the role of inheritance, and other forms of access to land, which may be linked to kinship ties, not emphasized enough. The size of the household was not taken into account in the most recent land redistribution, which again might encourage smaller households.

[4] Teferi Abate noted the scheduling conflicts introduced by the timing of food for work. The timing is often in conflict with the agricultural calendar and even when they try to time it in slack periods, it means that farmers cannot be earning income from other sources because they must contribute the labor for community projects. This may disproportionately affect women headed households that have more diversified income generating strategies.

[5]Jane Guyer noted that Ethiopia is distinctive in that men and women are not all that differentiated in terms of legal rights to land ownership. With the Derg, the rights of inheritance have diminished, but women still have access to land through redistribution.

[6]Female heads have more diversified economic portfolios than do male household heads. They are involved in small-scale trading, selling of wood and water, brewing and selling of alcohol, and so on (Yared Amare).